

# Examining the Career Paths of Members of European Parliament Elected in the 2019 European Parliament Election by the United Kingdom

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for  
the Degree of Masters in European Studies at the University of  
Canterbury

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2021

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## Acknowledgements

It would be fair to say that this thesis has been no small undertaking. Throughout the process of completing this thesis, I've faced a host of challenges and setbacks and without the support of the following people, I never would have been able to overcome them and get this thing finished.

Firstly, I'd like to voice my appreciation for the staff at the NCRE, and the University of Canterbury, for coming up on five years of learning and opportunities. In particular, I'd like to thank my thesis supervisor Prof. Martin Holland. Our regular meetings were indispensable parts of the process of churning my ideas and observations into concrete analysis and writing, as well as the assurance that the work I was doing was useful and novel. I'd also like to thank Dr. Serena Kelly, in particular for making me write my literature review in her research methods class in advance of writing full time, a boon that without I would surely have been under a lot more pressure to finish in a timely fashion. I'm also grateful for my classmates in the coursework portion of the degree, particularly those who I suffered a semester of presentations over Zoom in the lockdown of 2020 with – you all made it tolerable.

I would also like to say a very warm *go raibh maith agat* – *ngā mihi* – thank you to the wonderful team at the Embassy of Ireland Wellington, who graciously allowed me to work as an intern with them over the summer of 2020. I'm extremely grateful for the opportunity to get involved in the field of international relations outside of the classroom, and the experience was one I look back on fondly.

I couldn't possibly list every single friend who has supported me throughout this journey – there's simply been too many wonderful people who have helped in their own ways, big and small. Thank you all.

Finally, I'd like to thank my parents, for their unwavering and constant love and support in all its many forms over the years. Thank you for listening to me when I talked about my thesis, and more importantly, not asking me about it when I needed a break. Words can't describe how much it means to me.

## List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

AM - Assembly Member

DUP - Democratic Unionist Party

FPTP - First Past The Post

EP - European Parliament

EU - European Union

GE - General Election

LD - Liberal Democrats

MEP - Member of European Parliament

MLA - Member of Legislative Assembly

MP - Member of Parliament

MS - Member of Senedd

MSP - Member of Scottish Parliament

PC - Plaid Cymru

PM - Prime Minister

PR - Proportional Representation

SNP - Scottish National Party

TEU - Treaty on European Union

UK - United Kingdom

UKIP - United Kingdom Independence Party

UUP - Ulster Unionist Party

## **Abstract**

The European Parliament is the European Union's sole democratically elected institution, with elections held within the member states every 5 years. In 2019, amidst negotiations on the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the EU, known as Brexit, the British public went to the polls to elect a cohort of Members of European Parliament, with the knowledge they would be expelled from the parliament upon the completion of Brexit. This thesis examines who these MEPs were and their career paths, examining their political experiences before and after sitting in the European Parliament, and analyses the factors which influenced their political careers.

# 1. Introduction

In May 2019, despite having voted to withdraw from the European Union (EU) three years prior, voters in the United Kingdom (UK) went to the polls to elect a cohort of 73 Members of European Parliament (MEPs) to sit in the European Parliament (EP), as part of the EU-wide 2019 European Parliament elections. Despite reluctance from both the EU and the UK Government, as a full legal member of the EU, the UK was legally obligated to elect MEPs to fill its quota of representatives in the EP (Walker, 2021). In doing so, an unprecedented scenario was created, in which a national cohort of MEPs had been elected with the knowledge that they would not sit a complete term in office, as their terms would be cut short prematurely when the UK fully withdrew from the EU. Due to the irregular circumstance of the election, it provides a unique opportunity to contribute to the field of study of politician career paths, specifically the role that the European Parliament has in the careers of politicians. This thesis will examine political experience and backgrounds of the candidates, as well as their career choices following their departure from the EP, specifically to what level they have remained politically active.

## 1.1 Context

In order to understand the full intricacies of the 2019 EP election in the UK, this section will provide the full context of the events leading directly up to the election. This section will also include the mechanics by which the UK elects MEPs to the EP, and an overview of the office of MEP.

### 1.1.1 Political Context for the 2019 European Parliament Election in the UK

On June 23, 2016, in a nation-wide referendum, the population of the United Kingdom voted 51.89% in favour to withdraw from the EU. This result prompted the resignation of Prime Minister David Cameron, who had promised the referendum in his 2015 election campaign, despite campaigning to remain. His replacement, Theresa May, formally began the process of negotiating withdrawal from the EU on March 29, 2017. This process, as per Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union (2009), was to take two years, setting March 29, 2019, as the ultimate date upon which the UK would complete its withdrawal (May, 2017). With May's government holding a slim majority of 12 seats in the House of Commons, and with a large lead over the opposition Labour Party, May's government called an early general election with the aim of strengthening her mandate to negotiate withdrawal terms (Kavanagh, 2018).



However, the 2017 general election did not produce a favourable result for May's government. Instead of producing a clear mandate with which the Conservative Party could negotiate their withdrawal terms with the EU, an unexpectedly resurgent Labour Party, led by firmly left-wing Jeremy Corbyn, outperformed polling and won enough seats to create a hung parliament (Heath and Goodwin, 2017). Also of note during the 2017 general election was the collapse of prominent Eurosceptic United Kingdom Independence Party, dropping from winning nearly 13% of the vote in the 2015 general election to merely 1.2% in 2017. While still winning a plurality of seats, the Conservative party did not win a majority, and as such agreed to a confidence and supply agreement with the right-wing Northern Irish Democratic Unionist Party (DUP).

The lack of a decisive mandate for withdrawal negotiations created a significant hindrance for May's Government throughout the process of negotiating a withdrawal agreement with the EU. The process of negotiation with the EU itself proved to be a challenge, as it became clear that the UK overestimated their strength as an economic power and the position from which they were bargaining (Schnapper, 2020). Widely held British assumptions that the EU would be willing to compromise on its principles to strike a special deal with the UK, and that bilateral negotiations with individual member-states would allow the UK to leverage off of internal EU disunity proved to be misguided (Figueira and Martill, 2020). Instead, the UK's negotiating team was met with a united EU unwilling to offer bespoke arrangements.

Contrary to expectations, solidarity between the EU27 held strong throughout the Brexit negotiation. This disparity between assumptions and reality, combined with a negotiation team composed of civil servants isolated from the Conservative Party MPs, led to internal party strife. Two Conservative cabinet members, Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union David Davis, and Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson, both resigned due to their refusal to support the Chequers Plan, a government white paper detailing the first detailed vision of post-withdrawal EU-UK relations, just prior to its publication on 12 June 2018 (Jensen and Kelstrup, 2019). While the EU rejected the terms of the Chequers Plan, after another round of negotiations, a mutually acceptable withdrawal agreement was reached between the EU and UK negotiation teams on 14 November 2018 (May, 2018).

While the May government had successfully negotiated a withdrawal agreement with the EU itself, this agreement was met with disapproval from a number of factions within parliament, both from opposition parties and factions inside the Conservatives (Schnapper, 2020).

Opposition parties such as Labour, who favoured a "softer" Brexit, and the Liberal Democrats, who favoured a second referendum on withdrawal, opposed the terms of

withdrawal agreement, consistently voted down proposed Brexit legislature. Internal factions within the Conservative Party also objected to the negotiated withdrawal agreement, with Brexit hardliners opposing the deal on the grounds that it ceded too much ground to the EU, favouring little to no future co-operation with the EU. Other Conservative MPs, including those who had campaigned to remain in the 2016 referendum, opposed the deal on the basis that it distanced the UK too far from the EU, preferring to maintain closer ties post-withdrawal (Aidt et al., 2021).

Further complicating the matter was the stance of the DUP and the issue of the Northern Irish border. The Good Friday Agreement, the treaty governing the border between the Republic of Ireland (an EU member-state) and Northern Ireland (as part of the UK who were at that time also an EU member-state), had established a soft border between the two based on their membership of the EU and the European Single Market, which would be disrupted by Brexit. The DUP, a firmly Unionist party against any integration with the Republic of Ireland, were in opposition to any agreement which offered Northern Ireland any deal which differed from the rest of the UK (Keating, 2021). The DUP were also the sole Northern Irish party in the Westminster parliament at the time due to opposition Republican party, Sinn Féin, winning 11 seats but refusing to take them as part of their policy of abstentionism. Independent Unionist MP Sylvia Hermon was the only other politician to win a seat in Northern Ireland in 2017, voting in favour of May's withdrawal agreement. Consequently, the DUP opposed the passage of the withdrawal agreement as it created a scenario in which Northern Ireland remained within the EU's customs area.

Further complicating the issue of withdrawing from the UK was division between the internal nations of the UK itself. While the voting population of UK as a whole voted to leave the EU, with a margin of 52% in favour, this result was not unanimous between the four constituent nations of the UK. While England and Wales both overall voted in favour of leaving, Northern Ireland and Scotland both voted overall in favour of remaining within the EU. With a pro-remain majority in the Scottish Parliament, and an overall pro-EU sentiment in the Northern Ireland Assembly due to the EU's role in maintaining the peace process, the issue of the devolved sovereignty within the UK was seen as posing a potential challenge to the process of withdrawing from the EU (Wellings, 2021). However, rulings from the High and Supreme Courts in 2016 and 2017 respectively established that the right of a meaningful vote on the terms of withdrawal belonged to Westminster, not the devolved parliaments, furthering the divide between Northern Ireland and Scotland with England, and to a lesser extent Wales. This national divide was echoed in the opinions of English Conservative voters, who were

consistently found when polled to view Scottish Independence and the collapse of the Northern Irish peace process as a price they were willing to pay to ensure withdrawal went through (Wellings, 2021).

Due to this parliamentary deadlock over the terms of the withdrawal agreement, the withdrawal agreement was voted down three times at Westminster, with a number of other Brexit proposals, including withdrawing unilaterally without an agreement, known as a no-deal Brexit, also being rejected by parliament. This lack of progress resulted in the UK and EU agreeing to extend the deadline for the UK to leave the EU to 31 October 2019 (Walker, 2021). This deadline extension, however, came with the caveat that as per European law, the UK would be required to elect their allocated 73 MEPs to the European Parliament in the 2019 election, scheduled to take place between 23 and 26 May (Fella, 2019). This requirement was due to the UK legally still being a full member of the EU and therefore being legally obligated to participate in the election, as there were concerns that should the UK's allocated seats go unfilled, or filled via appointment rather than election, all actions taken by the EP could be legally challenged (Fella, 2019).

This created a unique situation in the EU's history, as the MEPs elected in the 2019 EP election would be elected with the expectation that they would be recalled within a few months, as the renegotiated withdrawal deadline had been set for 31 October 2019 (the date upon which the UK fully withdrew from the EU would ultimately be 31 January 2020). While some MEPs have sat terms shorter than the standard 5-year terms (either due to the nation joining the EU and electing a cohort of MEPs mid-term, or an individual MEP standing down), there has never been a scenario in which an entire country's cohort of MEPs have been recalled from the EP before the completion of their term.

### 1.1.2 European Parliament Elections in the UK

In electing its 73 MEPs to the EP, the UK was divided into 12 regions: one each for Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, and 9 for regions of England. Each region elects a number of MEPs closely proportional to their population via proportional representation (Thimont Jack et al., 2019). All regions except Northern Ireland use the D'Hondt system, which allocates seats in electorates on a sequential method, dividing the highest vote total by the number of seats allocated plus one, awarding the seat to the highest remaining vote total, then repeating until no seats are left unallocated (Pagel, 2019). Northern Ireland uses the Single Transferable Vote system, a system in which voters rank candidates on their ballot in order

of preference. The vote is then tallied in rounds, with the least preferred candidate being eliminated and their votes transferred to the voter's second preferred candidate, with rounds repeating until the remaining candidates equal the number of seats being elected (Electoral Reform Society, 2017). Northern Ireland has used this system since the introduction of elections to the European Parliament in 1979 as this mirrors the same system used by the Republic of Ireland, as well as being the system used in elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly. The rest of the UK adopted proportional representation for EP elections in 1999, prior to which the First Past The Post system was used in which seats are awarded purely on basis of highest number of votes received in a given electorate (Robinson, 2010). The EP elections were the only nationwide elections in the UK to use proportional representation, as general elections to the House of Commons use FPTP. Elections to the regional assemblies of the Scottish Parliament, the Senedd, and the London Assembly use the Additional Member System, a hybrid system which uses both single member electorates and regional proportionally assigned seats.

One key consequence of the use of proportional representation compared to FPTP is the process by which candidates are selected and elected. In FPTP, which uses a number of single member electorates elected by a simple majority, for which candidates usually selected to run with the appeal of the individual candidate to the individual electorate in mind. However, the proportional representation used in elections to the EP does not allow voters to directly choose an individual candidate to vote for, instead voting for a party from whom a proportional number of candidates from their list are elected (Robinson, 2010). As such, a candidate's position on this list is the primary determinant of their chance of election, which in turn is determined by their good standings within their political party. This has the effect of concentrating power towards the political parties themselves, as while in FPTP systems the support of the party of a candidate has a strong influence on their electability, in a proportional representation system like the one used in the EP elections in the UK, the party has a much stronger influence on who is allowed to run, with candidates ranking higher in their lists having much greater chances of being elected.

This election was contested all by parties with elected representatives in the UK at the time, as well as the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), which had won 24 of the 73 UK EP seats in 2014. Two new parties were also formed to contest the elections: The Independent Group for Change UK, consisting of a number of MPs and one MEP who had defected from the Conservatives and Labour due to their opposition to Brexit; and the Brexit Party, founded by former UKIP leader Nigel Farage as an explicitly pro-Brexit political party

(Helm, 2019). Turnout was 37% nationwide, a rise of 1.4% over the prior 2014 EP election and the second-highest turnout for EP elections in the UK (Cutts et al., 2019). This was below the overall average turnout of 50.66% EU-wide, and the 6<sup>th</sup> lowest national turnout.

Table 1: Results of the 2014 and 2019 EP Elections in the UK by Number of MEPs Elected

Party	MEPs elected in 2014	MEPs elected in 2019
Conservatives	19	4
Labour	20	10
Green Party of England and Wales	3	7
UKIP	24	0
SNP	2	3
Liberal Democrats	1	16
Sinn Féin	1	1
DUP	1	1
Plaid Cymru	1	1
UUP	1	0
Brexit	n/a	29
Change UK	n/a	0
Alliance Party of Northern Ireland	0	1

Source: Fella et al. (2019)

### 1.1.3 The Office of MEP

Members of European Parliament are, under normal circumstances, elected for terms of five years. Candidates are elected under national political party banners, but in the EP, may choose to organise into supranational political groups based on loose ideological affiliations. Multiple parties elected from the same member state may choose to sit within the same parliamentary group. Parties who choose not to align with a group are known as Non-Inscrits.

Table 2: Political Parties Represented in the UK in the EP in 2019 by Political grouping

Party	Grouping
Labour	Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats
Liberal Democrats, Alliance	Renew Europe
Conservative	European Conservatives and Reformists
Sinn Féin	The Left in European Parliament – GUE/NGL
Green, SNP, Plaid Cymru	Greens/European Free Alliance
Brexit, DUP	Non-Inscrits

Source: Fella et al. (2019)

MEP salaries are set at 38.5% of the basic salary of a judge at the European Court of Justice, currently €8,932/month (European Parliament, 2019). MEPs are also eligible for a €4576 per month general expenditure allowance to cover costs related to performing their parliamentary duties in the member state of their election, reimbursement for travel expenses related to their work up to €4,517, and an allowance of €324 per day while attending parliament. All former MEPs are entitled to an old-age pension from age 63, equalling 3.5% of the salary for each full year's exercise of a mandate up to 70% (European Parliament, 2019).

Until 2004 for the broader EU, and 2009 for the UK, it was legal to for a sitting MEP to sit simultaneously as a member of a national parliament, a practice which is known as a dual mandate (Council Decision 2002/772/EC, Euratom). While this practice is outlawed, it is still fully legal to hold office in regional parliaments, such as the Senedd, and local government, such as a councillor or a mayor, at the same time as sitting as an MEP. Additionally, members of the House of Lords must take a leave of absence to sit in the EP, and resume their position after leaving the EP.

## 1.2 Research Question

The main research question of this thesis is as follows:

How has the political experience of MEPs elected from the United Kingdom in the 2019 European Parliament Elections influenced the trajectories of their future careers, and to what extent do they remain in politics?

In the process of answering this question, two hypotheses will also be tested: 1) That MEPs elected for their first term in 2019 would be less likely to go on to seek domestic office than incumbent MEPs 2) Brexit Party MEPs elected in 2019 would be less likely to go on to seek domestic political careers than MEPs from other parties.

In addition to these, this thesis will analyse the 2019 EP election in the UK through the lens of Second Order election theory and explore links between MEP careers and how the EP is viewed as an institution by both voters and candidates.

## 1.3 Delimitations

The primary delimitation of this research was the relative recency of the topic, with the 2019 UK EP election having happened only two years prior to the time of writing of this thesis. As such, it is impossible to confirm long term trends in career paths in such a relatively short period. However, between May 2019, the date of the election, and June 2021, there have been several opportunities for the MEPs elected in 2019 to re-enter the political arena. These were the 2019 UK General Election, the 2021 local body elections in England and Wales, the 2021 regional elections to the Welsh and Scottish Parliaments and the London Assembly, as well as four by-elections in the House of Commons, and one by-election to the Scottish Parliament.

This thesis is also limited in scope by the decision to only record data for MEPs elected in the 2019 EP election. While it would be academically useful to compile a data set with information from UK MEPs elected in previous EP elections, the amount of effort required would fall significantly outside the scope of this thesis project. Instead, a number of existing studies on career paths of MEPs from other countries will be used as comparisons.

#### 1.4 Notes on Terminology

The set of 73 MEPs elected to the EP by the UK in the 2019 EP will be referred to in this paper collectively as “the 2019 MEP cohort”, for sake of clarity and concision.

The names House of Commons, Scottish Parliament, and Northern Irish Assembly will be used interchangeably with their respective metonyms: Westminster, Holyrood, and Stormont. The Senedd Cymru, or Welsh Parliament, will be referred to as the Senedd.

The political party Change UK was known variously across its 10-month existence as The Independent Group for Change, The Independent Group, Change UK – The Independent Group, and Change UK. In this thesis, it will be referred to exclusively as Change UK.

The Green Party of England and Wales, Green Party Northern Ireland, and Scottish Green Party are independent parties, each operating exclusively in their respective regions. As only the Green Party of England and Wales won seats in the 2019 EP election, when this thesis refers to the Green Party it will be understood as referring to them.

The Brexit Party renamed itself to Reform UK in January 2021, maintaining many of the same personnel and policies. As such, this thesis will use the names interchangeably as appropriate.



## 2. Literature Review

This chapter will begin with an overview of literature pertaining to the categorisation of MEP career trajectories, followed by an examination of the findings of previous studies on MEP career trajectories. It will then explain Second Order election theory, its application to the EP elections, and how it has been applied to MEP career paths. The chapter will conclude with a review of academic literature covering the 2019 EP elections in the UK.

### 2.1 MEP Research

#### 2.1.1 Categorisation

Many academics have studied the career paths of MEPs (Whitaker, 2014; Daniel, 2015; Daniel, 2016; Aldrich, 2018; Høyland et al., 2019). One of the first, and most prominent, works that attempts to categorise the role of the European Parliament in the career paths of MEPs was Scarrow (1997), who analysed MEP career paths as a means of determining the perceived power and prestige. Scarrow cross-references data on the length of tenure, and pre- and post-election careers from four sessions of the European Parliament, creating three archetypes from the resulting data. The first of these archetypes is the *Domestic Careerist*, who intends to use the European Parliament as a temporary stepping-stone to boost their domestic political career (Scarrow also uses this to refer to politicians holding a dual mandate in domestic and European parliaments, a practice since outlawed for national parliaments). The second archetype, the *European Careerist*, consists of MEPs who are committed to building a career within the European Parliament, and will stay in the parliament as long as they get re-elected. The third archetype, the *Political Deadend*[sic], refers to MEPs who do not seek re-election to the EP nor election to a domestic parliament; and are considered unlikely to win election to either in the future due to advanced age, over a decade of absence from the parliament, or death (Scarrow, 1997). Scarrow wrote that an increase of *European Careerist*-type MEPs would indicate that more and more politicians are viewing the European Parliament as a worthy setting to build a long-term political career in, and would increase its prestige and power as an institution in comparison with other European and domestic institutions.

Another scholar who contributed to the categorisation of MEP career trajectories is van Geffen (2016), who expanded upon Scarrow's three archetypes of MEP careers. Van Geffen

describes a new archetype of MEP as *Former National Politicians*, being politicians with existing domestic political careers who take up positions in the European Parliament at the end of their domestic careers. Van Geffen draws the distinction between these and Scarrow's *European Careerist* class due to their political experience giving them closer ties to domestic politicians, aiding them in advancing to senior positions more rapidly than European Careerists coming in with little to no existing political experience. Van Geffen also expands on Scarrow's categories by splitting the *Political Deadend* into two archetypes. The first of these is the *Retiring Politician*, who has domestic political experience, and takes up a seat in the European Parliament for one or two terms before retiring from politics. The second is the *One-Off MEP*, which are characterised by a lack of domestic political experience and short tenure in the European Parliament, serving only one or two terms but not entering domestic politics. While acknowledging the *One-Off MEP* archetype is a broad archetype and could be easily split into sub-archetypes, van Geffen argues that separating this archetype from retiring MEPs is justified due to the difference in motivations for entering the European Parliament. This expansion on Scarrow's categorisation of MEP careers will be applied to the MEPs elected from the United Kingdom in 2019 for my research, as it presents a robust framework based on a varied dataset, as it updates Scarrow's original framework based on the post Lisbon Treaty European Parliament.

Table 3: Scarrow (1997) and van Geffen's (2016) Five Archetypes of MEP Careers

Archetype Name	Archetype Description
Domestic Careerist	Spends short amount of time in EP, goes on to long domestic career
European Careerist	Spends a long time in EP, building career within EU institutions
Former National Politicians	As European Careerist, but with a long domestic career prior
Retiring Politician	Prior domestic career, short time in EP before retiring from politics
One-Off MEP	No prior domestic career, short time in EP, does not enter domestic politics after

Source: Scarrow (1997), van Geffen (2016)

### 2.1.2 Existing Studies of MEP Careers

While there have been multiple studies on the career trajectories of politicians within the EU, few have focused on the European Parliament as a venue for political career development. While there have been studies conducted on multi-level political careers in Czechia (Bernard

and Safr, 2016), Germany (Borchert and Stolz, 2011), Wallonia (Dodeigne, 2014), and Scotland and Catalonia (Stolz, 2011), these studies focused primarily on the career trajectories of politicians between regional- and national-level political offices, making little to no reference to the European Parliament as an institution.

It has been highlighted by many authors that the career paths of MEPs can vary, depending on the country they represent. Frech (2016) found that German political parties selected MEP candidates based on powerful, loyal candidates with national political experience; however, the parties did not tend to reward loyal MEPs with re-nomination for election. Real-Dato and Alarcón-González (2012), who examined the careers of Spanish MEPs from 1986 to 2010 before and after leaving office, found that it was most common for MEPs to have either no political experience (27.5%) or limited time in the national parliament (21.5%) upon election. Upon leaving the European Parliament, 66% of MEPs did not seek further political office. Furthermore, of the remaining 34% of MEPs who continue onto other political positions after leaving office, 69.3% of these only served one term in the European Parliament before moving on. They hypothesise that this indicates that the EP serves to provide a temporary placement before greater opportunities become available, rather than as a venue for gaining experience, as they found of all MEPs without prior experience who served a single term, only 7 out of 30 of them pursued further political office, which was mostly at the regional level.

Beauvallet and Michon's (2016) study of the career trajectories of French MEPs from 1979 to 2014 found 28% had prior parliamentary experience, 35% had no political experience, and 37% had experience with local politics. Of these, however, those with no political experience or with local experience tended to remain invested in the European Parliament over the course of multiple terms. Arter (2015), in a study of Finnish nominees for the European Parliament election of 2014 found that a surprising number of candidates were either sitting MPs (25%), or candidates for the prior Finnish parliamentary elections of 2011 (57%). This surprising amount of national commitment of national talent to the European Parliament was attributed to the desire to run candidates with existing name recognition in electorates in order to attract votes.

Bíró-Nagy's (2019) study of the political background of MEPs elected the 2004 and 2011 EP elections in 5 Central European nations which joined the EU in 2004 (Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Poland, and Hungary) provides insight into the use of national parliaments as recruitment grounds for EP candidacy. This study found that a greater percentage of MEPs elected by these countries had experience in their national parliaments,

ranging from 50% in Poland to 71.4% in Slovakia for the 2004 EP election, compared to the overall number of MEPs with domestic experience being 39% that election.

## 2.2 The European Parliament as a Second Order Election

Many scholars have defined the role of the European Parliament elections in the context of domestic voting patterns as being a second order election (Hix and Marsh, 2007, Prosser, 2016, Willermain, 2014, Hausemer, 2006, Hix and Marsh, 2011). Reif and Schmitt (1980) used the second order framework to discuss the European Parliament elections due to their perceived lack of impact on their electorate. First order elections are those which are seen as being most important due to the significance of their outcomes. In most Western democracies, these are the parliamentary elections, and where applicable, the presidential elections. In first order elections, the main factor influencing voters is the direct outcome of the election. This stands in contrast to second order elections, where voters are less influenced by the direct outcome of the vote due to its reduced scope, but also by the political factors and context of the primary political arena. This may lead to voters being more open to voting for smaller or newer parties, either because there is less at stake or as a protest vote against the agenda of the national government.

Since the first European Parliament election, its position as a second order election has been cemented by a gradual decrease of voter turnout, despite the gradual empowerment of the European Parliament theoretically strengthening the relevancy of the Parliament as an electoral arena (Corbett, 2014). In the 2014 elections, an agreement called the *spitzenkandidat*, or lead candidate, was implemented. Through this, each European political party would put forward a nominee for the President of the European Commission. This, combined with a series of televised debates between each candidate, intended to provide voters a greater opportunity to influence the European Union, increasing their importance and therefore voter turnout. However, this did not appear to be a major influence on voter turnout, with only 5% of voters listing the *spitzenkandidat* process as motivating them to vote in the elections (Willermain, 2014). While turnout dropped in 2014 from 2009, it was only a drop of .5%, being the smallest drop in turnout between European Parliament elections since 1984-89, thus demonstrating the impact of the attempts to shift the perception of the European Parliament elections from a second order to a first order election on voting habits.

However, some recent studies on the topic of the topic of voter patterns in the European Parliament elections dispute the second order hypothesis, arguing that while domestic issues have some level of influence on voting patterns, European policy concerns have also been influential in deciding voter behaviour (Ferrara and Weishaupt, 2004, Carrubba, 2005). In their analysis of the 2019 European Parliament election, Galpin and Trenz (2019) argue that the European elections have shifted from being second-order national elections, to “first-order polity” elections. Galpin and Trenz argue this change has occurred as the primary issues being debated in the election are regarding the legitimacy of the European Union as an institution itself. They argue that as the campaigns were fought more on EU-specific topics such as the European values of gender equality in the European constitution, and the future of integration, as opposed to being primarily focused on the policies and performance of the European parties. This shift towards becoming first order polity is argued to be caused not by any conscious effort by the European Parliament; in fact, Galpin and Trenz point to the domination of traditional and social media channels by figures like Matteo Salvini and Guy Verhofstadt as undermining the official Spitzenkandidaten process championed by the EU.

The effect European Union elections status as second order elections on the selection of political candidates has been studied by Hobolt and Høyland (2011). Their research looked at the relation between political experience in candidates nominated by parties, and their political success in the European Parliament elections. In a first order election, voters can vote with the intention to hold the government to account. However, in a second order election, it becomes harder to monitor the performance of the incumbent, as their political actions are less visible. Additionally, due to the structure of the European Parliament compared to a conventional parliament, there is no government to hold to account, further obscuring the impact of voting. Therefore, voters in second order elections such as the European Parliament may choose to vote based on the political competence of candidates. Using political experience as a proxy for competence, Hobolt and Høyland argue that voter patterns in the European Parliament elections is influenced strongly by the political experience of the candidate being run, in addition to the performance of the incumbent government, suggesting that parties could mitigate losses in European Parliament elections somewhat by running more experienced candidates. In addition, their study found that the effect of running experienced candidates in a European Parliament election was influenced by the timing of the election compared to the first order national elections. European Parliament elections being held at the midpoint between two national elections were found

to correlate with experienced candidates performing better when compared to European Parliament elections held closer to national elections.

The status of the 2019 European Parliament elections as either second-order national elections, or as first order polity elections, as well as how this is reflected on the selection of candidates and their political experience will be discussed in this thesis.

### 2.3 The 2019 European Parliament Election in the UK

Due to the recency of the 2019 European Parliament election, only limited literature has been published on the election, and very little of that covers the election in the United Kingdom. Three articles focusing specifically on the elections in the UK were found, Vasilopoulou (2020), Cutts et al. (2019), and Martill (2020). These articles provide solid overviews of the electoral factors surrounding the election, as well as voter behaviour and trends compared to the 2017 general election and 2014 EP elections.

While one paper on the results of the 2019 EP election in Northern Ireland exists (Haughey and Pow, 2020), the prominence of the unionism versus republicanism electoral cleavage means that the findings of this paper are not easily applicable to the rest of the United Kingdom. Other articles focusing on the 2019 EP election, such as Galpin and Trenz (2019), were also found. These articles are useful for providing greater context for the election, although they do not focus on the unique circumstances of the election in the UK, instead discussing broader election trends EU-wide.

Similarly, due to recency issues, little literature exists on the Brexit Party, the newly formed political party that won a plurality of the British seats in the 2019 European Parliament election, although several papers exist discussing the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP). UKIP can be considered the predecessor party to the Brexit party, due to their continuity in leadership and policy (Tournier-Sol, 2020), and although both participated in the 2019 European Parliament elections, nearly all the support base of UKIP switched to the Brexit party. In both the 2009 and 2014 European Parliament elections, UKIP attracted voters who were dissatisfied with the incumbent governments, but also attracted a large voter base primarily concerned with European-level policies, with particular support based on the issue of immigration (Treib, 2014). This was particularly evident in the 2009 European Parliament election, where over half of UKIP's voter turnout came from voters who would normally vote for the Conservative Party, but voted UKIP to express their dissatisfaction with their stance on European integration (Ford et al., 2012).

## 2.4 Literature Gaps

After conducting a review on literature related to this thesis topic, the primary gap in existing literature detected is surrounding the 2019 European Parliament Election, due to the recency of the election. While literature on past elections and the career paths of MEPs elected therein is still useful from a theoretical standpoint, the unique circumstances of the election in the UK will need to be accounted for when using these articles. For similar reasons, relatively little literature exists on the Brexit Party, as the party was founded in 2019 to contest the elections in the United Kingdom. Literature on UKIP, their predecessor party, has relevance to the topic due to their similarities, but the differences between the two and the contexts of the different elections they contested should be accounted for when discussing them. Additionally, no literature looking specifically at the candidates selected by either UKIP or the Brexit Party was found. This is not a major setback as theory on the topic of candidate selection should be broadly applicable.

## 2.5 Conclusion

This literature review provides an overview of academic literature on the topic of the career paths of Members of European Parliament, and first/second order theory and its application to the European Parliament elections. The career paths of MEPs is a topic which has been covered by several prominent scholars (Whitaker, 2014; Daniel, 2015; Daniel, 2016; Aldrich, 2018), covering aspects including pre-election careers and political experience, post-election career prospects, national trends, and the role of experience in re-election. Scarrow (1997) and van Geffen (2016) provide a framework for categorising the career trajectories of MEPs based on their experience on entering parliament, and their career choices after leaving parliament.

The theory of second order elections has been applied to the European Parliament elections by many scholars (Hix and Marsh, 2007; Prosser, 2016; Willermain, 2014; Hausemer, 2006; Hix and Marsh, 2011). The majority of scholars view voting patterns in the European Parliament elections as motivated by punishing domestic governments as opposed to voting on European policy issues. This was evidenced in the 2014 and 2009 elections in the United Kingdom, with voters who would have normally voted for the Conservative Party opting to vote for UKIP to express their dissatisfaction on Conservative European policy (Ford et al., 2012). This trend was amplified in the 2019 EP election, with former UKIP and some pro-

Brexit Conservative and Labour voters voting for the Brexit Party, and pro-Remain voters voting for the Liberal Democrats and Greens However, it is possible that the 2019 European Parliament elections could be considered first order elections due to the prominence of European level issues being debated (Galpin and Trenz 2019).



## Chapter 3. Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodology used when gathering data on the careers of the 2019 MEP cohort. An overview of the types of sources used to compile the dataset is provided, as well as talking about the difficulties encountered gathering this data. It details the categories of data recorded on the career paths taken by the cohort pre- and post-election, and how these will be sorted using Scarrow and van Geffen's MEP career archetypes.

### 3.1 Gathering Data

Information gathered was limited to the 73 MEPs who were elected by the UK in the 2019 EP election. The party affiliation of MEPs was recorded primarily as per their affiliation at time of election instead of at time of their expulsion. While some MEPs switched their party affiliation midway through their term in office, this was recorded separately from their affiliation at election, as this thesis is concerned primarily with their status at election, as post-election changes in party affiliation occurred independently of voter behaviour in the election. However, as this presents a variation in a subsection of MEPs, it warrants examination to determine if it had a notable effect on the career path of these MEPs, compared to those who maintained their party affiliation. Additionally, one SNP MEP, Heather Anderson was appointed to the EP four days prior to the withdrawal of the UK from the EU, taking the seat vacated by Alyn Smith, who was elected MP for Stirling in the 2019 General Election (Davidson, 2019). The case of Anderson has been excluded from this study due to her appointment to the EP as opposed to election, and her unusually short tenure as MEP.

In gathering data on the career paths of the 2019 MEP cohort, a variety of online sources, both primary and secondary have been used. Primary sources used include LinkedIn accounts, personal websites, official party biographies, and other social media accounts operated by the MEPs in question. LinkedIn in particular proved to be a valuable source of data on the careers of the MEPs, as users of the site may choose to display a chronological list of their current and past employment, and as such takes precedent in cases where conflicting information was found. Secondary sources used include news articles, press statements, and journal articles. For gathering data on some topics, including basic biographical facts such as age, Wikipedia was used as a primary reference. In cases where one source did not provide full information, e.g., only providing information on a MEP's career prior to election, multiple sources were used where possible. All data used was

gathered from sources which were publicly available; while LinkedIn pages are not visible without possessing a LinkedIn account, the accounts cited here were set to publicly visible and as such can be considered publicly available. As this is publicly available data, it did not require approval from the UC Ethics Committee. Data collected from these sources was compiled into a spreadsheet. The individual sources used to compile this data are listed in this thesis in Appendix 1.

Compared to previous academic studies on the career paths of MEPs, the process of gathering this data faced significant challenges. Other studies which have examined the career paths of MEPs have been able to access data from a variety of sources including surveys of MEPs run by both the EU and academics, interviews with individual MEPs, or the official EP website's "Your MEPs" section. However, none of these were viable for this thesis: I had no access to any surveys which were recent enough to contain relevant information, I did not have enough time to conduct the necessary number of interviews for a viable sample size, and while the EP database of MEPs contains curricula vitae of incumbent MEPs who choose to volunteer the data, it does not retain this data for MEPs who have left office. However, the disclosure of financial interest of each MEP is accessible, which aided in researching the occupations directly prior to their election. As such, it was necessary to conduct my own research, which draws upon a number of disparate sources to examine the career trajectories of the 2019 MEP cohort.

Another challenge unique to this study is that as the 2019 MEP cohort are no longer in office, many of their official websites and social media accounts, especially those without prior political experience or current office, have been removed from the internet since they have left office, presenting a further challenge to gathering data. Similarly, while LinkedIn was my preferred source of career data, not every MEP has an account, and while many former MEPs continue to update their LinkedIn accounts with their post-office endeavours, a number have neglected to continue to do so, erroneously identifying themselves as an incumbent MEP. In such circumstances, I have endeavoured to find a second source confirming their current occupation.

## 3.2 Data Collected

### 3.2.1 Pre-Election Data

To create a full dataset that would enable a full examination of the career paths of the 2019 MEP cohort, a selection of demographics was recorded for each MEP. First, basic

information was recorded: their name, the political party they were elected under, that party's EP political group, and which electorate they represented. Then, information on their activities before they were elected MEP was recorded. This included their highest elected office held before election, or if they had been an unsuccessful candidate for any office. The hierarchy used to determine the highest elected office was as follows: Life Peer > MP > MEP > MLA/MSP/AM/AS > Mayor > Councillor > Candidate for any of the above positions. In cases where the office of MEP was the highest achieved office of an incumbent, it was only recorded as such if they had sat non-consecutive terms as an MEP e.g., been elected or appointed, lost re-election, then been elected again in the 2019 election. All unsuccessful bids for any of the above positions were also recorded. The incumbency status of MEPs was also recorded, as well as the year they were elected to the office of MEP. For political parties with more than one MEP, who either have a formal European Parliament Leader position or the leader of their party as an MEP, the leader of the party was also marked separately to investigate whether this had a notable impact on their careers. The age and gender of every MEP was recorded, with age being recorded as of time of election.

The occupation held by each MEP immediately prior to their election was also recorded. This information was recorded in a way in which considered political office to take precedence over other occupations, specifically the office of councillor. Being a councillor is not a full-time position, and the fiscal compensation varies between country: £14,218 in Wales, £14,000 in Northern Ireland, and £18,604 in Scotland (Prestron, 2018, Scottish Government, n.d., Welsh Government, n.d.). In England, councillors do not receive a salary, although they are entitled to a basic allowance, the amount of which varies between councils (Local Government Association, 2021). While this is not a full-time occupation, and many councillors have other occupations as primary income sources, being a councillor will take precedence in reporting due to the focus of this thesis on political careers.

These points of data collected present a comprehensive image of the political careers and experiences of the 2019 MEP cohort prior to their election. It allows for an examination of their background prior to seeking office, and the extent of their prior political experience.

### 3.2.2 Post-Election Data

Details of the political careers of MEPs after they had been elected was also gathered, as part of assessing the role which serving in the EP has played in their future careers. This included what further political offices each MEP runs for after being elected. As mentioned above, the elections which occurred between the EP election in May 2019 and June 2021:

the 2019 UK General Election, the 2021 local body elections in England and Wales, the 2021 regional elections to the Welsh and Scottish Parliaments and the London Assembly, as well as four by-elections in the House of Commons, and one by-election to the Scottish Parliament. This includes the period in which they were actively sitting in the EP, as it is possible to stand for election in a national or regional parliament while sitting as an MEP, although in the event that an MEP wins election to a national parliament, they are required to abdicate their EP seat due to the dual mandate laws.

The occupation of each MEP was also recorded after they left office. Similar to the methodology used for recording occupation prior to entering office, political appointments such as councillor were recorded as taking precedence over other occupations in situations where a former MEP held both. In addition, this was extended to cover appointments to internal political party positions, such as leadership or advisor roles. While these positions may not be a full-time occupation, as they are directly tied to involvement with political parties, they present an opportunity to examine political careers and as such are included.

### 3.3 Mapping Data to Scarrow and van Geffen's MEP Archetypes

To aid in mapping the career paths of the 2019 MEP cohort to Scarrow and van Geffen's archetypes of MEP careers, a list of these archetypes and the exact criteria used in this thesis to assign these archetypes to MEPs will be provided. In these archetypes, being appointed to replace a resigning MEP is considered the same as being elected, as due to the list system used to elect MEPs, when an MEP resigns mid-term, they are replaced with the next candidate on the list. As this required an (initially unsuccessful) run for office, it can be considered a successful attempt at getting elected.

1. **European Careerist** – Defined by Scarrow as “[MEPs] who show a long and primary commitment to their European jobs ... who served for at least eight years in the elected European Parliament without winning a new national legislative seat”. For purposes of this thesis, a *European Careerist* will be considered someone who has been in the EP prior to 2014, without any prior political experience greater than local government. This includes MEPs who have served non-consecutive terms in office, but excludes MEPs elected in for the first time 2014.
2. **Domestic Careerist** – Defined by Scarrow as “those who use their seats as stepping-stones for winning (or regaining) national political office... who won national

legislative seats in domestic elections after their initial election to the European Parliament.” For purposes of this thesis, MEPs who have been elected for the first time in 2014 or later, who have since run for office in any other political office that they did not hold concurrently with their time as MEP (e.g., not a councillor position) will be considered a *Domestic Careerist*.

3. **Former National Politician** – Defined by van Geffen as “politicians who have already had a career at national level, either as an MP or a member of government, whose political life at national level has come to an end. For these politicians, a career in the EP has now become an interesting alternative.” For purposes of this thesis, a *Former National Politician* will be considered any MEP who has held office greater than councillor prior to election, and who was elected before 2014.
4. **Retiring Politician** – Defined by van Geffen as “MEPs over the age of 60 who had a career in domestic politics prior to their election as an MEP”. For the purposes of this thesis, any MEP over the age of 60 with political experience above the office of councillor elected in 2014 or later will be considered a *Retiring Politician*.
5. **One Off Politician** – Defined by van Geffen as “not typically hav[ing] a domestic political career either before or after his time in the EP, and typically stay[ing] in the EP for two terms at most.” For the purposes of this thesis, any MEP with no political experience above the rank of Councillor who was elected in 2014 or later and did not go on to seek political office will be considered a *One-Off Politician*.
6. **Other** – MEPs whose political careers do not fit into the above categories will be recorded separately.

## 4 Findings

### 4.1 Observation of Trends

This section of the findings will identify and examine overall trends found within the dataset assembled, including gender, age, offices held before election, and elections contested after leaving office. Where applicable, statistics for other UK-wide elections have been provided.

#### 4.1.1 Gender

Of the 73 MEPs elected in the 2019 cohort, 34 were female, or 46%. None of the MEPs elected from the UK in 2019 were transgender, nonbinary, or otherwise gender nonconforming. This percentage of female MEPs was an increase compared to the 2014 EP election, where the UK elected 30 female MEPs, or 41% of the total delegation (Raibagi, 2019). This compares favourably to the overall EP numbers, which as of the 2019 EP election was 40% female, or 308 of the 751 MEPs. Both the UK and overall EP fall within the ratio of between 40 to 60 percent female representation set by the European Institute for Gender Equality to promote gender equality (Pavone, 2019). Compared to individual EU member states, the UK had the tenth highest percentage of female MEPs, with the highest being Finland at 54% female MEPs, and the lowest being Cyprus, which elected zero female MEPs. Another comparison can be drawn to the 2017 UK general election, which elected 650 MPs, 208 of which were female, or 32% (Pilling and Cracknell, 2021). In the 2019 UK general election, this number increased to 220 female MPs, or 34%.

Table 4: Number of Female Parliamentarians Elected in UK-wide Elections

Election	UK EP 2014	UK EP 2019	EU EP 2019	UK GE 2017	UK GE 2019
Female Elected	30	34	308	208	220
Total Elected	73	73	751	650	650
Percentage Female	41%	46%	40%	32%	34%

Source: Author's Own Research, Raibagi (2019), Pilling and Cracknell (2021)

The party with the largest number of female MEPs elected in 2019 was the Liberal Democrats, with 9 of their 16 MEPs being female. The parties with the largest percentage of female MEPs were the Alliance, DUP, Plaid Cymru, and Sinn Féin, all of which elected 100% female MEPs, although they each elected only a single MEP. The party with multiple MEPs with the largest percentage of female MEPs was the Green Party, with 71% of their MEPs

being female. The party with the lowest percentage of female MEPs was the Brexit Party, with 28% of their MEPs being female, or 8 out of their 29 MEPs. The Brexit Party and the SNP were the only two parties to elect under 50% female MEPs.

Table 5: Number of Female Members of European Parliament Elected in 2019 by Party

Party	Female MEPs elected	Total MEPs Elected	Female MEP as Percentage
Brexit	8	29	28%
Liberal Democrats	9	16	56%
Labour	5	10	50%
Greens	5	7	71%
Conservative	2	4	50%
SNP	1	3	33%
Other	4	4	100%
Total	34	73	46%

Source: Author's Own Research

#### 4.1.2 Age

The average age of the 2019 MEP cohort at the time of the 2019 EP election was 53 years old. The youngest MEP elected, Lucy Harris (Brexit) was 28 when she took office, with the oldest MEP, Bill Newton Dunn (LD) being 78. The political party with the highest average age was the Conservative Party, with an average age of 62. The political party with more than a single MEP with the lowest average age was both the SNP and the Green Party, with an average age of 48 each. In comparison, the average age of MPs elected in the 2017 general election was 50 (Pilling and Cracknell, 2021).

Table 6: Average Age At Election of MEPs at Elected in 2019 By Political Party

Party	Average Age
Alliance*	47
Brexit	51
Conservative	62
DUP*	61
Green	48
Labour	56
Liberal Democrat	56
Plaid Cymru*	60
SNP	48
Sinn Féin*	57
Total	53

Source: Author's Own Research. Note: Parties with a single MEP marked with \*

When sorted into age categories spanning 10 years each, the largest age category for the 2019 cohort was between 50-59, with 26 MEPs, or 35%, falling into this bracket. This age category was also the same for MPs elected in the 2019 general election, however, the second largest age category for these MPs was 40-49, whereas the 2019 MEP cohort had 60-69 as its second largest age category.

Table 7: Ages of MEPs Elected in 2019 and MPs Elected in 2019 by Age Bracket

Age Category	MEPs elected in 2019	As % of total	MPs elected in 2019	As % of total
18-29	1	1%	21	3%
30-39	10	14%	109	17%
40-49	14	19%	183	28%
50-59	26	35%	195	30%
60-69	18	25%	106	16%
70+	4	5%	21	3%
Not Specified	-	-	16	2%
Total	73	100%	650	100%

Source: Author's Own Research, Pilling and Cracknell (2021)



#### 4.1.3 Political Experience Prior to Election as MEP

Of the 73 members of the 2019 MEP cohort, only 9 of them had held a regional or national political office prior to their election. Of these, 3 had served as MPs, 3 as MLAs, and 3 as MSPs. 4 had been elected as MEPs prior to their current term on non-consecutive occasions. Of the rest, 21 had been elected to positions in local government. 18 held the office of councillor as their highest elected role, as well as 1 mayor, 1 deputy mayor, and 1 lord mayor. 1 MEP sat as a Lord Temporal prior to election. Of the remaining 38 MEPs, 14 of them had unsuccessfully ran for either regional or national office prior to becoming an MEP. The other 24 MEPs had zero experience serving in political office prior to their election as MEP.

Table 8: Highest Political Experience prior to Election as MEP by Party

Party	MP	Lord	MLA	MSP	MEP	Local Govt.	Candidate	None	Total
Alliance	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Brexit	1	-	-	1	-	3	7	17	29
Conservative	-	1	-	-	-	-	1	2	4
DUP	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
Green	-	-	-	-	-	6	1	-	7
Labour	-	-	-	-	2	3	1	4	10
LD	2	-	-	-	2	8	3	1	16
PC	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	1
SNP	-	-	-	2	-	-	1	-	3
SF	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
Total	4	1	2	3	4	21	14	24	73

Source: Author's Own Research

Of the 73 members of the 2019 MEP cohort, 22 of the MEPs were incumbents who won re-election in the 2019 EP election. 49 won election to the EP for the first time in 2019. 2 MEPs had served as MEPs prior to the 2014 election where they lost their seats but were returned to office in the 2019 EP elections.

#### 4.1.4 Political Experience After Leaving the European Parliament

Of the 73 members of the 2019 MEP cohort, 15 ran for another political office at the regional or national level after being elected to the EP. 10 of these runs for election were in the 2019 general election. The other 7 were in the 2021 regional elections: 2 were to the Scottish Parliament, 2 were to the London Assembly, 2 were to the Senedd, and 1 was for the Mayoralty of London. Additionally, three MEPs who stood in the 2019 GE stood for regional offices: 2 to the Senedd, and 2 to the London Assembly. All but one of these runs for office were unsuccessful, the sole successful MEP being Alan Smyth (SNP), who won election to the electorate of Stirling in the 2019 general election. Additionally, 2 MEPs were nominated as Life Peers to the House of Lords following their departure from the EP.

Table 9: Election Attempts Made by MEPs post-election per party

Party	Westminster	Holyrood	Senedd	London Assembly	Total
Alliance	-	-	-	-	-
Brexit	6	-	2	2	10
Conservative	-	-	-	-	-
DUP	-	-	-	-	-
Green	4	-	-	-	4
Labour	-	-	1	-	1
LD	-	1	-	1	2
PC	-	-	-	-	-
SNP	1	1	-	-	2
SF	1	-	-	-	1
Total	12	2	3	4	20

Source: Authors' Own Research. NOTE: the 4 MEPs who ran for two races post-election are counted twice. Luisa Porrit (LD)'s run for London Mayor has been listed under London Assembly.

#### 4.2 Scarrow and van Geffen Archetype Findings

This section will contain analysis of the findings of the research on the career paths of the 2019 MEP cohort, using the above criteria to sort them into archetypes based on their career trajectories before, during, and after leaving office. Each individual archetype will be analysed individually, with two case studies of individual MEPs conducted per each archetype. These case studies provide in depth examples of each archetype, allowing for a thorough examination of the MEPs who fit into each archetype and why they are classified

as such. The MEPs selected will be, where possible, one female and one male, and one each from pro- and anti-Brexit parties, with an attempt made to feature at least one MEP of every party which elected more than one MEP in 2019. A party being anti-Brexit will be defined as parties whose MEPs signed the Brussels Declaration: The Labour Party, the Green Party, the Liberal Democrats, Plaid Cymru, the SNP, and Alliance (Stone, 2019). Pro-Brexit parties will be considered those who did not sign the Brussels Declaration.

The three MEPs elected in Northern Ireland will be discussed in a separate section, owing to the unique political scenario in Northern Ireland compared to the rest of the UK, and their unique career trajectories. As in Scarrow's original study, a section for MEPs whose career paths fall outside the archetypes will be included. All sources used to write the case studies can be found under the respective MEP's entry in Appendix 1.

Table 10: MEP Career Archetypes per Party Affiliation at Election

Party	European Careerist	Domestic Careerist	Former National Politician	Retiring Politician	One-Off Politician	Other	Total
Alliance	-	-	-	-	-	1	1
Brexit	1	5	-	1	21	1	29
Conservative	3	-	-	-	-	1	4
DUP	-	-	1	-	-	-	1
Green	-	4	-	-	3	-	7
Labour	3	1	-	-	6	-	10
Liberal Democrat	3	2	1	-	9	1	16
Plaid Cymru	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
SNP	1	-	-	-	-	2	3
Sinn Féin	-	-	1	-	-	-	1
Total	12	12	3	1	39	6	73

Source: Author's own research

#### 4.2.1 European Careerists

European Careerists are MEPS who have committed themselves to a political career with a commitment to the EP as the primary arena. Of the 2019 MEP cohort, 12 were European Careerists. 9 of these MEPs were incumbents; two Liberal Democrat MEPs, Phil Bennion and Bill Newton Dunn, had sat in the EP, lost their seats in the 2014 EP election, then been re-elected in 2019. Similarly, Labour MEP Neena Gill was elected in 1999, lost her seat in the 2009 election, then was re-elected in 2014. Of these 12 MEPs, only two of them had been successfully elected to office before being elected to the EP: Jill Evans (PC) and Catherine Bearder (LD), both of whom had served as councillors. Besides from these, 4 of these MEPs had unsuccessfully run for national or regional office prior to being elected as an MEP. Ages of these MEPs ranged between Of this group of MEPs, only one ran for office after election, Alyn Smith (SNP) who ran in the 2019 General Election. Notably, Smith is the only MEP out of the entire 2019 cohort to successfully win election to another political office. Additionally, Daniel Hannan (Cons.) was appointed to the House of Lords as a Lord Temporal after leaving office. Also of note is that of all parties which have a formal leader of their EP delegation (Brexit, Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrat), this office was held by a European Careerist, in addition to the sole Plaid Cymru MEP.

##### 4.2.1.2 Case Studies: Nigel Farage (Brexit), Catherine Bearder (LD)

Nigel Farage (Male, age 55) was first elected to the EP in 1999 in the constituency of South East England as a member of UKIP. He became the leader of this party from 2006 to 2009, and then again from 2010 to 2019. He left the party in 2018 and went on to found the Brexit Party in 2019, which he led until 2021. Prior to his election to the EP, he worked as a commodities trader, having unsuccessfully ran for national office twice, in the 1997 General Election and in the 1994 by-election in the constituency of Eastleigh, as well as an unsuccessful run in the 1994 EP election. Notably, and somewhat irregularly for a sitting MEP, he ran for national office multiple time while sitting as an MEP, in the general elections of 1997, 2001, 2005, 2010, and 2015, as well as the 2006 by-election in the constituency of Bromley and Chislehurst, all of which were unsuccessful. After leaving office, Farage resigned as leader of the Brexit Party, now renamed to Reform UK, and was appointed to the board of the Dutch Green Business Group. Although his numerous attempts at election to Westminster may not necessarily be indicative of a commitment to European politics, Farage's long career in the EP qualifies him as a European Careerist.

Catherine Bearder (Female, age 70) was first elected to the EP in 2009 in the constituency of South East England as a member of the Liberal Democrats. In 2014 she was the sole Liberal Democrat MEP in the EP, becoming their de facto leader, a position which was formalised after the 2019 EP election in which the Liberal Democrats elected 16 MEPs. Additionally, from 2014 to 2019, she served as a Quaestor of the European Parliament, an administrative position within the EP appointed by the President and Vice Presidents of the European Parliament. Prior to her election, she had run for office three times: once in the EP election in 1999, and twice in the 1997 and 2001 general elections. She had also sat as a councillor on the Oxfordshire County Council prior to her election. Immediately prior to her election as MEP, she worked as a constituency organiser for the Liberal Democrats. After she left office, she became a trustee for the International Fund for Animal Welfare, an animal rights non-profit, and a member of the council of Unlock Democracy, a political advocacy group against human trafficking. The length of her tenure qualifies her as a European Careerist; additionally, her appointment as Quaestor serves as a further indicator for her commitment to building her political career within the institutions of the EU.

#### 4.2.2 Domestic Careerists

Domestic Careerists are MEPs who use a short time in the EP as a launching point for a career in domestic politics, which they intend to make the main arena for their political career. Of the 2019 MEP cohort, 12 fall under the classification of domestic careerists, as they came into the EP with no prior domestic political experience, served less than eight years, before attempting to run for a domestic office. Of the 12 Domestic Careerists, 6 held positions in local governance before being elected as MEP: five councillors and one mayor. These 6 MEPs with experience also made up the entirety of the Green and Liberal Democrat Domestic Careerist MEPs. Additionally, only four candidates had had unsuccessful runs at office prior to their election, three of which were Green MEPs, the other being Brexit Party MEP David Gill. All but two of the domestic careerists were elected in the 2019 EP election.

By definition, every Domestic Careerist ran for office after being elected to the EP. Of the offices sought, the majority of them were for Westminster in the 2019 General Election, with 8 of these MEPs standing. Notably, these were all 4 Green MEPs and all but one Brexit MEP from this category, although two of the Brexit party MEPs were candidates for regional parliamentary elections in 2021 in addition to their general election runs. Two Brexit MEPs stood for the London Assembly, one Brexit and the single Labour MEP stood for the Senedd,

one Liberal Democrat stood for the Scottish Parliament, and one Liberal Democrat ran for the London mayoralty. None of the MEPs from the domestic careerist archetype were successful in their post-EP election bids. However, five of this archetype went on to assume non-elected roles in political parties after leaving office. Molly Scott Cato (Green) became an internal party spokesperson for the Greens, Richard Tice, Nathan Gill and David Bull (Brexit) were appointed Leader of Reform UK, Leader of the Reform UK Wales party and Deputy Leader of Reform UK respectively, and Martin Daubney became Deputy Leader of the newly formed Reclaim Party.

#### 4.2.2.1 Case Studies: Richard Tice (Brexit) and Jackie Jones (Labour)

Richard Tice (Male, aged 49) was elected MEP under the Brexit Party for East of England in the 2019 EP election. Although he had not ran for any form of political office prior to becoming an MEP, he was a director of the Business for Sterling campaign, a campaign to prevent the UK adopting the Euro; co-founded Leave.EU in 2015, a pro-Brexit campaign group; and founded Leave Means Leave in 2016, a group advocating a no-deal Brexit. Tice was also appointed as Chairman of the Brexit Party in April 2019. After leaving the EP, he unsuccessfully ran in the 2021 London Assembly elections in the Havering and Redbridge constituency, coming 5<sup>th</sup>. Tice was selected as Leader of the Reform Party in March 2021. Prior to his term as MEP, he was CEO of Quidnet Capital LLC, a position which he maintained during and after his term as MEP. Tice's run for the London Assembly, and his ascension to party leader after leaving office, as well as his lack of electoral history prior, marks him as a Domestic Careerist.

Jackie Jones (Female, 53) was elected MEP under the Labour Party for Wales in 2019. Jones had no prior experience with political office prior to election to the EP. At time of election, she volunteered as President of the NGO European Women Lawyers Association, and as chair of the NGO Wales Assembly of Women. Professionally, she was a professor of Feminist Legal Studies at the University of West England prior to her election. After leaving office, Jones unsuccessfully ran in the 2021 Senedd election for the seat of Preseli Pembrokeshire. She became an advisor for Labour for a European Future in 2021, a Labour party organisation promoting relations with the EU. Due to Jones's attempt to take office after her short period in the EP, she can be classified as a Domestic Careerist.

#### 4.2.3 One Off MEPs

One Off MEPs, who had no political experience above local politics, stayed in the EP for two terms or fewer, and did not seek further office, were by far the largest demographic represented in the 2019 MEP cohort, at 39 of the cohort of 73, or 54%. Of all of the One Off MEPs, 10 of them sat in local political offices immediately prior to election, all sitting as councillors with the exception of Green MEP Magid Magid, who was simultaneously Lord Mayor of Sheffield (An elected but honorary title). Four additional MEPs had been councillors prior to election but were not incumbent at time of election. 18 of these MEPs had made unsuccessful runs for office before being elected to the EP. Notably, all but one of these had unsuccessfully ran for seats in Westminster, as well as 5 unsuccessful attempts to enter the EP, but not a single One Off MEP had run for office at the regional level.

As per the criteria established by van Geffen, MEPs who were elected for the first time in the 2014 EP election onwards are categorised as One Off MEPs. However, while the majority of these One Off MEPs were elected in 2019, 7 of them were either elected in the 2014 EP election or had stood in the 2014 EP election but were appointed to fill vacancies made by MEPs stepping down. Of particular interest is that of these 7 MEPs, 6 of them were from the Labour Party, making up the entirety of their One Off MEP cohort. The other of these MEPs was Jonathan Bullock, a Brexit Party MEP who had switched affiliation from UKIP. While the MEPs elected in 2019 had no realistic prospects of building a career in the EP due to the reality of the UK's imminent withdrawal, it is possible the MEPs elected in 2014 came into office with the intent of building a career there, and therefore present a noteworthy subsection of the One Off archetype.

Another subsection of the One Off archetype are MEPs who, either voluntarily resigned from the Brexit Party, or were expelled from the party. These MEPs consisted of Annunziata Rees-Mogg, Lance Forman, Lucy Harris, who resigned to join the Conservative Party, Louis Stedman-Bryce who resigned to sit as an independent, John Longworth who was expelled and sat with the Conservative Party, and Andrew England Kerr who was expelled and sat as an independent. All of these MEPs fall under the One Off Archetype, as they had no experience holding political office prior to election, and did not pursue office after leaving, but their experience as switching party allegiance mid-term marks them as a noteworthy subsection of the One Off archetype.

After leaving office, none of the One Off MEPs sought further political office. However, one Brexit Party MEP, Claire Fox, was appointed as a Lord Temporal after leaving office. Also of

note is that one Brexit Party MEP, Robert Rowland, died in a scuba accident after leaving office.

#### 4.2.3.1 Case Studies: Alexandra Phillips (Brexit) and Magid Magid (Green)

Alexandra Phillips (Female, 35) was elected in 2019 for the Brexit Party in South East England. Formerly a journalist for ITV and BBC Wales, Phillips worked for UKIP as head of media, as well as working as a consultant for SCL Group, which worked on media consultations for the 2017 Kenyan election. Immediately prior to election, she worked as a media advisor for then-UKIP MEP and AM Nathan Gill, who would also later go on to join the Brexit Party. After leaving office, Phillips took up a role as a presenter on newly-launched television channel GB News. This career path of a short term in the EP being the extent of Phillips' political experience means she can be classified as a One Off MEP.

Magid Magid (Male, 30) was elected in 2019 for the Green Party in Yorkshire and the Humber. Magid is a Somali-British former refugee. Prior to his election to the EP, Magid served as a Councillor for Sheffield, as well as Lord Mayor of Sheffield, a ceremonial role selected by the council to represent the city in a number of ceremonial settings. Notably, in this role, Magid ceremonially banned American President Donald Trump from entering the city of Sheffield. After leaving the office of MEP, Magid founded the non-profit Union of Justice, an organisation dedicated to promoting racial and environmental justice based in Brussels, as well as authoring a book on these topics. As Magid possessed only political experience at the regional level prior to his election as MEP and did not go on to seek further elected office after leaving the EP, he falls under the category of One Off MEP.

#### 4.2.4 Former National Politician

Former National Politicians are politicians with a career in domestic politics but choose to move to the EP to pursue a career there. As MEPs who were elected to the EP in 2019 for the first time could not have reasonably expected to create a career there, due to the imminent withdrawal of the UK from the EU, only MEPs elected for the first time prior to 2019 can be considered Former National Politicians, as the intent to create a career is a defining factor of the archetype. Therefore, only three MEPs elected in the 2019 EP election fit the archetype: Dianne Dodds (DUP), Chris Davies (LD), and Martina Anderson (SF). Two of these MEPs will be discussed later in this section as MEPs elected in Northern Ireland present enough unique trends for separate analysis.



#### 4.2.4.1 Case Study: Chris Davies (LD)

Chris Davies (Male, 65) was first elected to office in the 1995 Westminster by-election to the electorate of Littleborough and Saddleworth for the Liberal Democrats. He had previously run unsuccessfully for election in the 1979, 1987, and 1992 general elections, and he failed to win re-election in the 1997 general election. He had also served as a councillor in Liverpool from 1980-84, and in Oldham from 1994-1998. Davies first won election to the EP in the 1999 EP election in the North West England constituency and would win re-election until 2014. In 2014, Davies won a parliamentarian of the year award for his role in creating Fish for the Future, an all party group promoting reform of the Common Fisheries Policy. Davies was re-elected to the EP in the 2019 EP election. In the period in which he was in between terms, he worked as a senior advisor in Brussels for FleishmanHillard, a global PR consultant firm. After leaving the EP in 2020, he took a position as senior advisor with Rud Pedersen Public Affairs, a Europe-focused public affairs firm. Davies' career in domestic politics, and his subsequent career in the EP, means he falls under the category of a Former National Politician.

#### 4.2.5 Retiring Politicians

Retiring Politicians are defined by van Geffen as politicians who are over 60 years old, have had a domestic career but use a term in the EP as a final office before retiring from politics entirely. Only one MEP from the 2019 cohort fit this criteria, as although two other MEPs elected in 2019 fully consider themselves to be retired, they also sought further office after leaving the EP, which disqualifies them from this category. Brian Monteith (Brex.) was the only MEP elected in 2019 who falls under the category set out by van Geffen.

##### 4.2.5.1 Case Study: Brian Monteith (Brexiteer)

Brian Monteith (Male, 61) was first elected to the Scottish Parliament in 1999 under the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party for the Mid Scotland and Fife region. He won re-election until he left the party in 2005 due to conspiring against the leader of the party, sitting as an independent and choosing not to run for re-election. Directly prior to his election, he worked as communications director of pro-Brexit lobby group Global Brexit, as well as editor and owner of ThinkScotland.org, a policy website. Monteith was elected to the

EP in 2019 in North East England for the Brexit Party. After leaving the EP, he returned to the roles he had occupied prior to election. As Monteith has had a notable domestic career in regional politics, serving a short time in the EP before retiring from electoral politics, he falls under the category of a Retiring Politician.

#### 4.2.6 Northern Irish MEPs

This section will cover the three MEPs elected in the electorate of Northern Ireland. These MEPs warrant examination separate to those elected in the rest of the UK for a number of reasons. The divide between Irish republicanism, which aims for reunification with the Republic of Ireland, and unionism, which advocates for Northern Ireland to remain part of the UK. Due to this divide, elections in Northern Ireland are not typically contested by the parties which otherwise run candidates nationwide. Instead, elections are contested by parties specific to Northern Ireland, as well as ones which run candidates in elections in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. In addition to this, EP elections in Northern Ireland are carried out using the Single Transferrable Vote system, which is the same system used for both European and general elections in the Republic of Ireland. All of these factors mean the constituency of Northern Ireland is unique compared to others in the UK.

The career paths of MEPs elected in Northern Ireland followed trajectories which differed greatly from their counterparts in the rest of the UK. All three of these MEPs were female and had served as MLAs before their election to the EP. Additionally, Naomi Long (All.) had served as a MP, Councillor and Lord Mayor of Belfast in her political career. Two of the three, Martina Anderson (SF) and Diane Dodds (DUP) were incumbents, having sat since 2012 and 2009 respectively. However, while only Anderson actively ran for office post-election in the 2019 general election, all three of these MEPs were appointed as MLAs after they left office, in order to replace absences made in Stormont by resigning MLAs, in a process unique to Stormont known as co-option (Devenport, 2015). Through this process, Northern Irish parties may appoint MLAs to fill vacancies left by resigning MLAs of their party, to avoid the cost of holding by-elections and potentially unbalancing the party political balance within the six-member constituencies of the Northern Ireland Assembly. This trajectory of going from regional, to European, to regional politics is completely different to any other career path in the 2019 MEP cohort. The unique nature of this is amplified by the fact that these MEPs did not win re-election to these seats.

#### 4.2.6.1 Case Studies: Diane Dodds (DUP), Naomi Long (All.)

Diane Dodds (Female, 61) was first elected in the 2003 Northern Ireland Assembly elections in the electorate of West Belfast for the DUP. She was also elected to the Belfast City Council in 2005. After losing her seat in Stormont in the 2007 election, she was elected as MEP for the DUP in Northern Ireland in the 2009 EP election. Prior to serving in politics, Dodds was a constituency worker for the DUP offices. After she left the EP in 2020, she was co-opted to fill a seat in the Stormont constituency of Upper Bann, which was left vacant when DUP MLA Carla Lockheart was elected to the House of Commons in the 2019 GE. From January 2020 to June 2021, Dodds served as the Minister for the Economy in the Northern Ireland Executive. While Dodds' transition from domestic to European politics would otherwise qualify her as a Former National Politician due to her commitment to creating a new career in the EP, her return to domestic politics after leaving the EP indicate that her career path falls outside the definitions of any of the archetypes set out by Scarrow and van Geffen.

Naomi Long (Female, 47) was first elected to office in 2001, to the Belfast City Council. In 2003, she was elected to the Northern Ireland Assembly in the constituency of Belfast East, where she served as MLA until 2010, when she stood down as she had been elected MP for Belfast East in the 2010 general election. Prior to her entry into politics, she worked as an environmental engineer. She had also served a term as Lord Mayor of Belfast from 2009-2010. Long lost her Westminster seat in the 2015 general election. Following this, she returned to Stormont in the 2016 election, winning election in the Belfast East constituency. In 2016 she was also made Leader of the Alliance Party. In 2019, she was elected MEP for Northern Ireland in the 2019 EP election, after which she resigned her office as MLA. After leaving the EP in 2020, she was co-opted to the office of MLA in the Belfast East constituency, filling a vacancy left by the resignation of Alliance MLA Máire Hendron, who had been co-opted the year prior to fill Long's vacant seat. She was appointed Minister of Justice in the Northern Ireland Executive that year. Due to Long's long and varied career in politics prior to entering the EP, it would be possible to classify her as a Former National Politician, if she had not been elected in 2019, as there could be no expectation of building a career in the EP due to Brexit being imminent. Similarly, she cannot be classified as a Retiring Politician, as she re-entered office after leaving the EP. Therefore, Long's career as a politician falls outside any of the categories set out by Scarrow and van Geffen.

#### 4.2.7 Others

This section will cover members of the 2019 MEP cohort whose political careers fall outside the archetypes as defined by Scarrow and van Geffen, excluding the Northern Irish MEPs discussed above. Although this is a grouping defined by its heterogeneity, in the five MEPs who fall under this category, one sub grouping can be defined: MEPs who could be considered Retiring Politicians if they were old enough. This consists of three MEPs: Martin Horwood (LD), Aileen McLeod (SNP), and Christian Allard (SNP). These MEPs had previously sat in the House of Commons or the Scottish Parliament and had entered the EP for the first time in 2019. Additionally, Allard ran for the Scottish Parliament in the 2021 election. However, none of these MEPs fit neatly into an archetype. None of them are over 60, meaning they don't qualify as a Retiring Politician. As they entered the EP in 2019, with no viable prospects of building a career there, they don't qualify as European Careerists or Former National Politicians. Due to their past political experience, they don't qualify as One-Off MEPs. As such, not fitting into any other category, they can be classed as Others.

Two other MEPs elected in 2019 do not fit into established categories. The first of these is Nosheena Mobarik (Cons.), who prior to serving as an MEP was nominated as a Life Peer in the House of Lords. Mobarik, who unsuccessfully stood for election to the EP in 2014, was subsequently nominated as a life peer. However, in 2017, she was appointed to the EP to fill the seat of resigning MEP Ian Duncan. For the duration of her term of office as MEP, she took a leave of absence from the House of Lords due to EU laws prohibiting dual mandates. After leaving the EP, she returned to the House of Lords. As the House of Lords is not a directly elected political office, but still a domestic political office of note, it does not fit into any of the established archetypes which focus on electoral politics. As such, Mobarik's experience as a Lord means that she can be classified as Other. The second MEP who falls outside of established categories is Ann Widdecombe (Brex.) who, prior to her election to the EP in 2019, had served as a Conservative MP for the electorate of Maidstone and the Weald from 1987 to 2010, after which retiring from electoral politics. However, she came out of retirement to contest the 2019 EP election for the Brexit Party, also contesting the seat of Plymouth Sutton and Devonport in the 2019 general election. This unique career path of a politician with a notable political career coming out of retirement to contest an EP election, followed by a run for domestic office, does not align with any of the archetypes of MEP careers as set out by Scarrow and van Geffen, and as such is placed in the Other category.

#### 4.2.7.1 Case Studies: Ann Widdecombe (Brex.) and Christian Allard (SNP)

Ann Widdecombe (Female, 72) first entered political office in 1976, when she was elected a District Councillor for Runnymede Council. After failed bids for election in the 1979 and 1983 general elections, Widdecombe was elected in 1987 for the Conservative Party in the constituency of Maidstone. Widdecombe would hold this electorate until 2010, where she stood down, retiring from politics. During her time in office, she served as Minister of State for Employment and Minister of State for Prisons from 1995 to 1997, and then Shadow Health Secretary and Shadow Home Secretary in opposition from 1999 to 2001, after which she retired from front bench positions. Prior to her entering office, she was an administrator at London University. After she left office, she worked as a columnist for the Daily Express and took various political commentary positions in the media. In 2019, she came out of political retirement to run for the Brexit Party in the 2019 EP election, where she was elected to the constituency of South West England. She also unsuccessfully contested the seat of Plymouth Sutton and Devonport for the Brexit Party in the 2019 general election. After leaving the EP, she continued to work as a political commentator. Widdecombe's long domestic career followed by nine years of political retirement, and subsequent return to electoral politics to contest the 2019 EP and general elections, does not fit into any archetype of MEP careers, falling into the Other category

Christian Allard (Male, 51) first came to political office in 2013, when he was appointed to fill the vacant additional member seat created when MSP Mark McDonald resigned to contest the 2013 Aberdeen Donside by-election. He was appointed despite not having ran in the 2011 Holyrood election due to a quirk of the Additional Member System used to elect the Scottish Parliament; as the SNP had won every constituency in the North East of Scotland region with McDonald as their only regional list MSP, they had no other list candidates to nominate and as such were able to appoint Allard. Prior to his appointment, Allard had worked as a constituency officer for SNP MSP Dennis Robertson. Allard ran for re-election in the 2016 Holyrood election on the regional list, but did not return to Holyrood. In 2017, Allard was elected to the Aberdeen City Council, and in 2019, he was elected to the EP in the 2019 elections for the SNP in the constituency of Scotland. After leaving office, Allard ran in the 2021 Holyrood election, again on the North East of Scotland regional list, but did not win re-election. Allard does not fit the One Off category due to his political experience before and after leaving the EP, and he does not fit as a Former National Politician due to his election in 2019, where he could not expect to build a career in the EP. Therefore, he falls under the Other category.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1 Hypotheses Revisited

#### 5.1.1 Hypothesis 1: Incumbency and Post-EP Elections

The first of the hypotheses which this thesis aimed to test was that MEPs elected for their first term in 2019 would be less likely to go on to seek domestic office than incumbent MEPs. This research found that, of all the 24 MEPs elected in the 2019 EP election who had sat as an MEP prior to 2019, only 4 ran for office after being elected. In comparison, of the 49 MEPs who were elected for the first time in 2019, 12 ran for election after being elected as MEP, equal to roughly 25% compared to the 12.5% of the incumbents. This hypothesis was based on the assumption that politicians with more political experience, which they had gained through sitting multiple terms in office as MEPs, would be considered more valuable than politicians for whom their election in 2019 was their first elected office. However, this hypothesis was proven false, in that more MEPs who had never been elected to a regional or national political office ran for office after being elected.

One possible explanation for this trend would be to look at the elections contested by these MEPs. The majority of the offices contested by the 2019 MEP cohort were seats in the 2019 general election, in which seats are elected using FPTP, a system which heavily favours two major parties at the expense of other parties. Of these MEPs who contested seats in the 2019 general election, 5 were Brexit Party members, 4 were Green Party MEPs, one was a SNP MEP, and one was a Sinn Féin MEP. As the Brexit and Green parties are minor parties who are unlikely to win election in the FPTP system, there is a strong likelihood that these candidates did not realistically expect to win the seats they contested, instead running for other reasons, such as to boost visibility for their party or to provide an option for a protest vote. While the other two parties sending MEPs to contest seats in the 2019 general election, the SNP and Sinn Féin, are third parties, they are also regionalist parties who only run candidates in Scotland and Northern Ireland respectively, where they have strong support bases. As such, their runs for office can be seen as having a serious possibility of winning election. Further evidence of this theory is that of all the MEPs who ran for office after being elected in the 2019 EP election, the only MEP to be successfully elected was Alan Smyth (SNP) who ran in the 2019 general election.

The fact that so few incumbent MEPs chose to run for election in domestic politics brings into question the value of experience at the EP level. If the political experience that these politicians had accumulated while serving in the EP was considered to be an attractive asset

for domestic politics, it would stand to reason that more of these MEPs would have run for domestic office following their departure from the EP. One possible explanation is that these MEPs had no interest in domestic politics. This could be due to a particular affinity for the EU as an institution, or a dislike for the institutions of national and regional politics, but it would explain why so few of these MEPs with experience in the EP chose to pursue careers domestically. Similarly, a simple desire to retire from electoral politics could motivate incumbent MEPs, many of whom had served upwards of ten years in office prior to 2019, to choose to not seek further elected office.

A third possible explanation for this trend is that the political experience that came from being an MEP was considered a negative, rather than a positive. As public opinion on the EU was divided, with the majority of Wales and England outside of London voting to leave the EU in the 2016 Brexit referendum, a long experience serving in the EP might have been seen as a detrimental association with an unpopular institution. This would correlate to the victory of Alan Smyth, who won a seat in Scotland, a pro EU region, with the SNP, a pro EU party.

The number of MEPs elected for their first term in 2019 who went on to run for election being relatively low, at 12 out of 49, could also be explained as being a product of a negative affiliation with an unattractive European institution. However, while this may ring true for pro-EU parties running in predominately anti-EU regions, such as the Green Party and Liberal Democrats in England, if this assumption were to be true it would follow that parties whose stance of the EU matches that of their primary electorate would field more ex-MEPs as candidates, e.g., the Brexit Party and England, or the SNP and Scotland. Looking at the data, the Brexit Party and the SNP both fielded a number of ex-MEP candidates, with 6 Brexit Party MEPs and 2 SNP MEPs running for office after leaving the EP. One notable irregularity with this data, however, is that 3 of these Brexit Party MEPs contested seats in the London Assembly, one of the most anti-Brexit regions of England. However, this overall correlation between pro- and anti-Brexit parties running ex-MEPs in pro- and anti-Brexit regions of the UK is not particularly strong, with 10 ex-MEPs running in regions with matching Brexit sentiment, and 8 ex-MEPs running in regions with opposed Brexit sentiment (counting the two Brexit Party MEPs who ran for two separate offices as separate attempts). If there was a stronger correlation between party Brexit stance and the Brexit stance of the regions they ran in, this would indicate that experience in the EP had a strong influence on choosing candidates for domestic office. However, the weak correlation indicates that other factors would have influenced this decision to an equal or greater extent. Without being able to

interview a statistically significant sample of the 2019 MEP cohort, it is unlikely that the true motivators behind the post-EP careers of these MEPs will be uncovered.

#### 5.1.2 Hypothesis 2: Brexit Party MEPs and Future Political Office

The second hypothesis which this thesis aimed to test was that Brexit Party MEPs elected in 2019 would be less likely to go on to seek domestic political careers than MEPs from other parties. The research conducted found this hypothesis to be proven partially true, as while more Brexit Party MEPs went on to run for office than of any other party numerically, as a percentage of total MEPs elected both the Green Party and the SNP had more MEPs who went on to seek office. 6 Brexit Party MEPs went on to run for office after being elected to the EP, with 4 of these MEPs running in two separate elections. This comes to 21% of their 29 MEPs. In comparison, the SNP had two ex-MEPs run for office after leaving the EP, or 66% of their 3 MEPs, and the Green Party had 4 ex-MEPs run, or 57% of their 7 MEPs. Additionally, Sinn Féin's single MEP ran for office, meaning their party had 100% of their MEPs run for office. Therefore, while the hypothesis can be considered to be partially true, the relationship between political party and seeking office post-EP is worthy of examination regardless.

An important factor to consider for this trend of the number of Brexit Party MEPs seeking office after election is the timing of these elections. The 2019 general election occurred midway through the term of the 2019 MEP cohort, being called by newly appointed Conservative PM Boris Johnson to strengthen his then-weak mandate for renewed withdrawal negotiations with the EU. Crucially, Nigel Farage, leader of the Brexit Party, made the decision to not run candidates in Conservative-held seats, focusing on challenging seats held by anti-Brexit candidates in order to ensure the election of a pro-Brexit majority (BBC, 2019a). This resulted in four Brexit Party MEPs leaving the party to sit with the Conservatives, as well as a reduction in the number of general election candidates being fielded from 593 to 276. Among those whose candidacy was cancelled were Brexit Party MEPs Matthew Patten, Alexandra Phillips, and Michael Heaver. MEP Rupert Lowe was also listed as a prospective parliamentary candidate but withdrew his nomination prior to the deadline for fear of splitting the pro-Brexit vote. These four Brexit Party MEPs whose candidacies were quashed wouldn't have pushed the Brexit Party's percentage of ex-MEPs seeking domestic office higher than the Green Party or the SNP, but would have further increased the number of total MEPs to over double that of the second highest party.



Another factor of this timing is that the nature of the elections contested, and their purpose for the Brexit Party. In the 2019 general election, the Brexit Party stood candidates with the goal of securing a pro-Brexit majority in Westminster in order to ensure that the UK withdrew from the EU. Following the UK's withdrawal, the Brexit Party rebranded itself to Reform UK, announcing a new set of policies focused on domestic issues. The first elections contested under the Reform UK banner were the 2021 regional elections to the Senedd and the London Assembly, in both of which Reform UK failed to elect any candidates.

Another interesting trend is that of all the parties, Brexit Party MEPs contested more elections than any other party, with ex-MEPs running in the 2019 general election, and the 2021 Senedd and London Assembly elections. In addition, 4 Brexit Party MEPs were the only MEPs who contested multiple elections out of the entire 2019 cohort, with two MEPs contesting both the 2019 general election and the 2021 London Assembly election, and two contesting the general election and the 2021 Senedd election. These 4 MEPs were the only Brexit Party MEPs to contest elections outside of the general election, which, when taken in the context of Reform UK's origin as the Brexit Party, can be seen to indicate that these MEPs were the only politicians who were committed to the party as more than a vehicle to ensure Brexit got done. As such, the post-EP ambitions, or lack thereof, of the Brexit Party MEPs indicate that while stopping Brexit was a high priority, the party itself was only seen as a platform to develop a full political career by a small handful of its MEPs. In contrast, the Brexit MEPs who either stood for office in the 2019 general election, or were prepared to, can be seen as potentially not a commitment to the party itself as a long term political entity. Instead, their candidacy was a means to ensure the withdrawal of the UK from the EU actually went through, as the Brexit Party's tactic of only contesting Labour-held seats to split the vote and ensure a pro-Brexit majority likely had very little risk of Brexit Party candidates winning seats, meaning there was little long term commitment required from the candidates themselves.

## 5.2 Trends in Political Experience Prior to Election

One trend which can be observed in the career paths of the 2019 MEP cohort is the overall lack of political experience prior to their election. MEPs who had experience with elected political office at the regional or national level were in a clear minority, with only 9 of the cohort having held such an office prior to becoming an MEP. Instead, the cohort was dominated by MEPs who had either failed election attempts or no political experience, who

comprised 38 of the 73 MEPs, or just over half. When combined with the 21 MEPs for whom the highest office held was at the local level, it becomes apparent that the cohort consisted primarily of politicians with no experience in regional or national electoral politics. However, a noteworthy figure is that of all the political parties who won seats in the election, the Brexit Party had the largest number of MEPs with no prior elected experience, with only 5 of their 29 MEPs having ever held office. In comparison, the party which won the second-most seats in the 2019 election, the Liberal Democrats, had only 4 of their 16 MEPs with no elected experience. Notably, 8 of their MEPs had held office in local politics prior to their election to the EP. The Labour Party also had an even split of 5 prior office holders and 5 newcomers. However, the Green Party MEPs were dominated by politicians with experience at the local level, with 6 of their 7 MEPs having experience as councillors prior to election. Another noteworthy trend is that the MEPs elected by both the Conservative and Labour parties were almost entirely incumbents, with all 4 Conservative MEPs and 9 out of 10 Labour MEPs having been elected to the EP prior to the 2019 election.

One factor in explaining the rates of political experience in MEPs per party is the overall position of these parties within the national election system. The Brexit Party, being newly founded to contest the 2019 EP election, held very few offices as a party, with the few they held prior to the 2019 EP being politicians who had defected from other parties. As such, their access to politicians with experience to stand in the 2019 EP election would have been limited, forcing them to rely primarily on candidates with no political experience. On the other hand, the Liberal Democrats and the Green Party are parties with established presences in the UK's electoral system as third parties, with elected representatives in national, regional, and local government. Due to the FPTP voting system used to elect MPs to the House of Commons, these third parties are underrepresented at the national level, but have a number of councillors elected in local politics (Pickling and Cracknell, 2021). As such, it stands to reason that, due to these parties electing primarily MEPs with council backgrounds in the 2019 EP election, these parties are using their established base of council politicians as a recruiting pool for political talent.

### 5.3 The Careers of the Northern Irish MEPs

As discussed in section 5.1, the majority of the 2019 MEP cohort did not seek further election, with only 16 of the 73 MEPs running for office in domestic politics after being elected to the EP, and only 1 successfully being elected. As a substantial amount of analysis has been done on this topic in section 5.1, this section will instead focus on other trends.

One of these trends is that while only 1 member of the 2019 MEP cohort was elected, the three MEPs representing Northern Ireland were all appointed to the Northern Ireland Assembly through the process of secondment to fill vacancies. These three vacancies were created by three existing MLAs leaving the Assembly, however, each of these MLAs stood down for different reasons: one was elected to the House of Commons in the 2019 general election, one retired after a 15-year career as MLA, and one stood down after being seconded to fill the vacancy left by the election of the MEP she would be replaced by. The process of secondment is specific to the Northern Ireland Assembly due to the STV voting system used, however, the use of secondment to ensure the return of the three Northern Irish MEPs across three different parties is a unique situation worth examining. While the Northern Ireland Assembly is unique amongst the political offices of the UK because of its use of STV, it is also the only legislative body in the UK to operate on the principle of power sharing. As per the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, the executive of the Northern Ireland Assembly is required to include at least one Unionist and at least one Nationalist party, with one of each taking the office of First Minister and Deputy First Minister. If these conditions are unable to be fulfilled, then the Assembly cannot sit, and no legislation can be passed. This has led to many situations where disagreements between unionist and nationalist parties can turn into deadlocks in which the Executive is unable to function for long periods of time. Most notably, a dispute over a failed green energy scheme in 2017 led to the Executive collapsing and remaining suspended until January 2020 (McDonald and O'Carroll, 2020). This new executive coalition included the DUP, Sinn Féin, and the Alliance Party, as well as the UUP and the Social Democratic and Labour Party, with ex-MEPs Diane Dodds (DUP) and Naomi Long (Alliance) taking roles as ministers in the Executive.

These former MEP's secondment to the Northern Ireland Assembly could be explained as a desire by these parties to return these experienced politicians to regional politics in a time where the balance of power was fragile in the Assembly. All three of these MEPs had served as MLAs prior to being elected to the EP. Two of them, Dodds (DUP) and Anderson (SF) had served in the EP for over two terms, while Long (Alliance) was elected to the EP for the first time in 2019. Dodds was seconded to a vacancy created when DUP MLA Carla Lockhart was

elected to the House of Commons in the 2019 general election, and Anderson was seconded to replace retiring Sinn Féin MLA Raymond McCartney, who retired in January 2020 after sitting as MLA for 15 years. While Dodds' secondment could be due to the convenient timing of the 2019 general election, it's possible that, given the timing of his retirement, McCartney was requested by the party to retire to allow Anderson to sit as MLA. On the other hand Long's return to the Assembly was explicitly planned beforehand as the MLA seconded to her seat, Máire Hendron, announced her intention to stand down immediately upon the UK leaving the EU, with Long stating she would return to the Assembly (BBC, 2019b). Regardless, the return of these MEPs to the Northern Ireland Assembly could be due to the freshly negotiated power sharing agreement, with a desire to have experienced politicians to increase the political skill of the respective parties' Assembly delegation. This could be further linked to the ongoing negotiations regarding the future of Northern Ireland and the EU, with negotiations surrounding the Irish border being of particular importance to the parties in Stormont. The experience of these former MEPs, particularly those with multiple terms served in the EP, may have been seen as valuable assets for the future negotiation of the border issue. Furthermore, as the next Assembly election is not due to be held until 2022, the use of secondment to appoint these politicians to the Assembly would ensure they were able to return in such a timeframe that their EU expertise could be utilised as soon as possible.

#### 5.4 Second Order Election Model and the 2019 EP Election in the UK

The Second Order Election Model is a framework for examining trends within EP elections created by Reif and Schmitt (1980), which argues that, as voters believe there is less at stake in these elections, their voting patterns are motivated less so with the immediate result of their vote on the EP, and more by punishing or rewarding the parties governing at a national level. This contrasts with a first order election, which is typically electing to a national parliament, where voters will vote motivated by policy concerns. This section will examine to what extent the 2019 EP election in the UK can be considered first or second order elections, and what effect that may have had on the political careers of the 2019 MEP cohorts.

Reif and Schmitt use three voter behaviours to classify the EP elections as second order when compared to first order national elections. These are 1) that turnout is lower 2) that parties in government at the national level will suffer losses and 3) that larger parties will do worse, while smaller parties will do better. Voters may be motivated to vote in different

patterns between national and European elections based on different policy priorities at different levels, but they believe the most powerful motivator for voters to switch their voting patterns is to express dissatisfaction with national governments.

Using Reif and Schmitt's metrics to compare national and European elections in the UK, the first metric of turnout shows the 2017 general election as having a turnout of 69%, while the 2019 EP election had a turnout of 37%, a marked decrease. The second metric of governing party losses is evidenced by the fact that the Conservative Party, which were the governing party at the time of the 2019 EP elections, came fifth place overall with 9% of the vote, their worst nationwide election result ever. The third metric of smaller parties gaining while larger parties losing also holds true, as the two parties who did the best in the 2019 EP election were the Brexit Party and the Liberal Democrats, parties with no and minimal representation respectively in Westminster. Therefore, the 2019 EP election in the UK can be considered to be a second order one.

However, in a 2019 paper, Galpin and Trenz argue that the 2019 EP elections should be considered not as second order national elections, but as "first order polity" elections. They argue that the primary motivation for voters in the 2019 EP election is not merely punishing the incumbent government of member-states, instead, voters are motivated to vote in the EP elections by constitutional issues of the EU itself. They point to the decline of the traditional centre-left and centre-right EP political groupings, and the increase of votes for groupings with alternative politics such as liberals, green politics, and far-right nationalism as evidence of this, noting that while specific EU policies were not the focus of election campaigns, debates over the core values of the EU, such as human rights, gender and LGBTQ+ equality, freedom of speech, and social liberalism dominated the election campaigns leading up to the election. They argue that the election is used as an opportunity to cast judgement not against national governments but the elites of the EU and the balance of national and supranational sovereignty from both the left and right wings of politics, with the progressive empowerment of the EP as an institution providing a more than symbolic venue to affect change.

However, to what extent can this be applied specifically to the 2019 EP election within the UK? Galpin and Trenz do bring up the election in the UK specifically as an example of an election dominated by the core values of the EU, noting that both the governing Conservative Party and main opposition Labour Party lost votes over their Brexit stances compared to the pro-EU Liberal Democrats and anti-EU Brexit Party. However, while the elections in the EU27 can be argued to be first order polity elections for the reasons above, a key factor that Galpin

and Trenz neglect the impact of is the explicitly domestic nature of the 2019 EP elections in the UK, due to the ongoing active Brexit negotiation. While the focus of the election was on EU-focused issues, the process of the UK negotiating the withdrawal from the EU, which was ongoing at the time of the election, shift the focus of these arguments away from the EU elites as Galpin and Trenz argue, towards the domestic politicians, and specifically the governing Conservative Party, who suffered the biggest loss in the EP election compared to their result at the prior general election. In particular, the Brexit Party and the Liberal Democrats, who campaigned specifically in response to the progress of the Brexit negotiations being carried out by the UK Government, were parties who saw significant success in the 2019 EP elections. Additionally, this was the first national election contested by both the Brexit Party and Change UK, two parties established explicitly in response to the UK Government's Brexit negotiation process (Vasilopoulou, 2020). As such, while Galpin and Trenz's categorisation of the 2019 EP election as a first order polity election may hold true for the election when considered as an EU-wide election, the nature of the election specifically in the UK in the context of the ongoing Brexit negotiations mean that the election in the UK can be considered a second order national election.

Under the premise that the 2019 EP election in the UK can be considered a second order national election, what can be said about its impact on the career paths of the MEPs elected? The clearest way in which this impact is felt is in the election results, specifically the drop in seats from the Conservative and Labour parties, who lost 15 and 10 seats respectively compared to their 2014 election result, and the increase in seats from the Liberal Democrats and the Green Party, who increased their number of seats from 1 and 3 in 2014 to 16 and 7 respectively. This is in addition to the disappearance of UKIP, who dropped from winning 24 seats in the 2014 EP election to zero in 2019, and the rise of the Brexit Party, which, in it's electoral debut, won 29 seats. As a result of voters voting in response to their dissatisfaction with the Conservative Government's Brexit negotiations, these three parties rose to account for 52 of the UK's 73 MEPs, all but 6 of whom were first time MEPs (including two former UKIP MEPs who changed allegiances, and two Liberal Democrat MEPs who were elected prior but lost their seats in 2014). In contrast, the Conservative and Labour parties, who were the governing and opposition parties respectively, were reduced to 14 MEPs between them, all but one of whom were incumbents. As such, the main impact of the second order national nature of the 2019 EP election can be seen as the influx of first time MEPs from parties critical of the national Government and Opposition, at the cost of incumbent experienced MEPs affiliated with these parties.

## 6. Conclusion

With analysis of trends in the findings of this thesis completed, this concluding section will discuss the implications of the 2019 EP election in a broader context and consider avenues for future research on the subject, as well as the limitations of the research with the benefit of hindsight.

### 6.1. Implications

While this research has focused on the 2019 EP election, the career trajectories of its MEPs, and the implications of their return, or lack thereof, to the domestic sphere, the implications of their absence on the EP as an institution is also a topic worthy of examination. With the removal of the 73 British MEPs, 27 of these seats were redistributed among the EU27, while the remaining 46 were held unfilled to be assigned in event of future expansion of the EU. This had a small impact on the balance of the political groupings of the EP, as the redistribution of the seats of the 2019 MEP cohort among the EU27 caused net gains for some groupings, and net losses for others. However, the full effects of this withdrawal fall outside the scope of this thesis, as in order to paint a full picture of the impact of this seat redistribution, examining the UK's MEP delegation elected in the 2014 EP election would be required. This is because in order to fully grasp the impact of the redistribution, it must be examined in context of the trends of the UK's recent history of EP elections, as the results of the 2019 EP election were an outlier in terms of political party strength. As such, they do not present a full picture of the shift in party power in the EP.

Similarly, the withdrawal of 73 MEPs may have had an effect on the political strength of the EP as an institution within the broader context of the EU as a complex political entity. 24 of the MEPs in the 2019 cohort had been elected to the EP prior to 2019, with some of them having sat as MEP for upwards of 15 years, and as such their withdrawal represents a loss in institutional knowledge which may affect the EP's ability to pass legislation effectively. Again, examining this falls outside the scope of this thesis, as to effectively compare the political experience of the 2019 MEP cohort to the MEPs who failed to win re-election an examination of the MEPs elected in 2014 would be warranted.

### 6.2 Limitations

One of the major limitations discovered during the process of writing this thesis is the lack of existing studies with which the data compiled on the 2019 MEP cohort could be compared. Most existing studies found did not cover a single term cohort of MEPs from a single country. While a handful of studies existed which covered MEPs elected from the UK,

they all covered multiple terms compiled into the same data set. This meant that it was impossible to compare the 2019 MEP cohort to other previous cohorts to examine trends over time, as instead the data would only allow comparison to an amalgamation of multiple cohorts.

The timing of which the research for this thesis was conducted also presented two limitations. Firstly, while numerous opportunities have occurred for the 2019 MEP cohort to advance their political careers, it is impossible to perform a long term analysis on the career trajectories of the cohort. Secondly, it is impossible to compare the trajectories of the cohort to the MEPs elected in the EU27 in 2019, as the MEPs from the UK were the only ones who had their terms cut short due to Brexit. In the future, research comparing the career trajectories of the entire cohort of MEPs elected EU-wide, or in a selection of member states, in 2019 may prove valuable to determine the overall impact of Brexit on the UK MEPs' career trajectories compared to a regular MEP career.

While the use of Scarrow and van Geffen's categorisation of MEP career archetypes was an appropriate framework for categorising the careers of the 2019 MEP cohort, it presented some challenges. The largest of these was that the original study was ambiguous as to how it classified as MEPs who ran for office unsuccessfully. The decision was made to expand the definition of the Domestic Careerist archetype to include failed runs for office to provide a more thorough examination of the MEPs' career trajectories, as only one MEP was successfully elected. Additionally, as mentioned above, Scarrow's original 1997 paper did not separate out the cohorts by year, which made a direct comparison to the 2019 cohort even harder. Furthermore, Scarrow's study covered the MEPs elected from 1979 to 1994, since which the EP has evolved in terms of strength, as well as the UK switching from FPTP to proportional representation to elect its MEPs, meaning that while the data would still be useful, it would come with several caveats that would preclude an exact comparison to the 2019 cohort.



### 6.3 Thesis Conclusion

This thesis aimed to identify trends in the political experience of the MEPs elected by the UK in the 2019 European Parliament election, focusing on their political careers prior to entering the EP, and to what extent they pursued a political career after leaving the EP. The 2019 MEP cohort was chosen due to the unique situation of their mid-term withdrawal from the EP due to Brexit, as it offered an opportunity to examine the role of the European Parliament in the careers of politicians in multi-level political systems.

The research found that the majority of MEPs elected in 2019 had no experience in national or regional politics prior to entering the EP, and ran for very few electoral office during or after their term in the EP. The MEPs who did were mostly affiliated with the Brexit Party, and contested seats mainly in the 2019 general election. MEPs elected for the first time in 2019 were twice as likely to contest elections than MEPs elected in prior years. Of all the MEPs who contested elections after being elected to the EP, only one of them won election, although three Northern Irish MEPs were seconded to the Northern Ireland Assembly, and two MEPs were appointed Lords Temporal.

This research, as part of the broader field of research on political careers within the EU, and on the EP as an elected body, indicates that the MEPs elected in 2019 by the UK had a low level of political experience owing to shifting vote shares in response to the Government and opposition's handling of Brexit negotiations. Future research in this field may be needed, however, to examine the long term political careers of these MEPs, and how their experiences compare to their former colleagues elected in the same election by other member states of the EU.

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## Appendix 1: Sources for Data Gathered on MEP Careers

The following consists of the sources used to compile the data set used in this thesis. MEPs are listed by order of last name alphabetically, with their party affiliation at time of election listed. Multiple sources were used where needed, but single sources, such as LinkedIn accounts and official party profiles, were prioritised where possible.

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